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## **CHINA, INDIA AND GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE : THE CASE OF THE CLIMATE CHANGE**

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## **ABOUT THIS POLICY BRIEF**

On 21 February 2011, the Leuven Centre for Global Governance Studies convened a workshop on “China, India and Global Environmental Governance: The Case of Climate Change”.

The event was chaired by Prof. Dr. *Hans Bruyninckx*, Director of the Research Institute for Work and Society (HIVA), Professor for International Relations and Global Environmental Governance and senior member of the Leuven Centre for Global Governance Studies at K.U.Leuven. Invited speakers were Prof. Dr. *A. Damodaran*, Professor in Economics and Social Sciences at the Indian Institute of Management at Bangalore, Dr. *Jingquan Chen*, Second Secretary at the Mission of the People’s Republic of China to the EU, and Mr. *Jürgen Lefevere*, Advisor for International and Climate Strategy at the European Commission’s DG Climate Action. The programme of the workshop is included in the annex to this policy brief.

The policy brief takes the workshop as a basis for a discussion of China’s and India’s current and future roles in global environmental and climate governance. Where it employs the views expressed by the speakers, these represent personal views rather than those of their respective institutions. The policy brief should therefore not be considered as literal minutes of the meeting, nor can any parts of it be attributed to a particular speaker.

## **1. GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE IN A POLARIZING WORLD : TRENDS AND CHALLENGES**

Despite a decennia-long quest for global institutions that could guarantee effective policies for the protection of the environment in domains ranging from deforestation over desertification to climate change, the state of the planet has by and large not seen any substantial improvement since the onset of global environmental governance. On the contrary, existing trends of environmental degradation have been reinforced for a whole range of problems and “effective policy responses are needed at all levels of governance” (UNEP 2007: chapter 1). This can be adequately demonstrated with the example of climate change. The emission of greenhouse gases (GHG) has not been halted by the emergence of a United Nations (UN) climate regime in recent decades. As a result, trends such as the rise of global mean temperature around 0.75 °C between 1906 to 2005 and of sea levels by an average of 1.8 mm per year since 1961 are bound to be set forth (IPCC 2007: 2-4). The effects of these trends can already be felt across the planet in the form of changed weather patterns, impacting on human living conditions in various ways, and sparking concerns about possibly “abrupt or irreversible” consequences of climate change (IPCC 2007: 13).

Key drivers of a further degradation of the environment are, above all, global production and consumption patterns coupled to continued population growth (UNEP 2007: chapter 1). Further pressure on eco-systems is thus bound to come from major population and growth centres like China and India. While the rapid ascent of these nations in economic terms has been welcomed from a developmental perspective, both countries’ growth patterns have already exacerbated pollution within their borders, and are contributing to processes of environmental degradation at a global scale. Both are faced with a dilemma: where pollution-related problems (air and water pollution, forest loss, desertification) have multiplied in China as much as in India, the energy needed for sustaining growth in both countries stems, in the first place, from the combustion of coal and oil (Jakobson 2009: 33, 37-39; Korppoo/Luta 2009: 56-59). This, in turn, implies that both players’ continued

commitment to growth is bound to significantly contribute to pollution, notably climate change, for years on end.

Table 1. Current and Historical Carbon Dioxide Emissions (2005)

	Share of global emissions (2005, CO <sub>2</sub> e)	Per capita emissions (2005, tCO <sub>2</sub> e)	Cumulative CO <sub>2</sub> emissions as share of global emissions (1950-2005)
US	18.29%	23.4	26.47%
EU	13.86%	10.1	23.8%
China	19.13%	5.5	10.9%
India	4.92%	1.7	2.64%

Source: World Resources Institute (<http://cait.wri.org>)

As a matter of fact, both Indian and Chinese GHG emissions are projected to rise steeply for the foreseeable future. In recent years already, China has overtaken the United States as the largest absolute emitter of greenhouse gases, while Indian responsibility for climate change remained fairly limited to date (see Table 1). Under the business-as-usual scenario, China would overtake Western Europe as a *cumulative* CO<sub>2</sub> contributor during the 2020s and the US by mid-century, while India would arrive at an equal level of *cumulative* CO<sub>2</sub> emissions as Western Europe by 2080 (Botzen *et al.* 2008: 571).

From a sustainable development perspective, the current and projected Chinese and Indian growth patterns will not only have ever more devastating repercussions for the state of the global environment, but this “environmental degradation (...) threatens future development progress” in the long run (UNEP 2007: chapter 1), especially because both China and India are highly vulnerable to environmental problems, most importantly the effects of climate change.

This outlook moves both players centre-stage when it comes to tackling environmental challenges through global governance. Global environmental governance is essentially about humanity’s attempt at protecting the environment as a global common good through actions at not just the global, but multiple levels of

policy-making, stretching from the global over the national to the local (Biermann 2006). At each of these levels, both China and India have actively begun to engage in forging solutions to pollution-related problems: at the local and national levels through policy frameworks and concrete hands-on initiatives, in the global sphere via an active implication in recent negotiation rounds under the UN on problems such as biodiversity loss (e.g. at the 2010 Nagoya Biodiversity Summit) or climate change (e.g. through organizing negotiation sessions like the New Delhi conference of the parties (COP) 8 in 2002 or the Tianjin preparatory session for COP 16 in 2010). These negotiations are also - besides a common border in the Himalayan - the key tie that binds the two countries on environmental topics. Where this bond had long been their memberships to the G-77/China coalition of over 140 developing countries, it is now a joint adherence to a “coalition within this coalition” created in 2010: the BASIC group of emerging powers, including Brazil, South Africa, India and China.

This policy brief explores what role(s) China and India play in contemporary global environmental governance. This is initially done through brief single-country studies of, first, China, and, then, India. Subsequently, a view will be taken at these two countries through the lens of the European Union (EU), another major player in global environmental governance. The contribution refers to global environmental governance more generally, but consistently focuses on global climate governance as an emblematic example, which tries to tackle the currently most visible environmental problem. Although local and national developments are evoked, attention is centrally paid to the current state of global climate negotiations under the United Nations umbrella.

## **2. CHINA AS A PLAYER IN GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE**

Three decades of double-digit economic growth launched by the 1979 reform and open-door policy have transformed China’s role in global environmental governance dramatically. The country moved from contesting global environmental governance as a “problem confined to capitalism” in the 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment (UNCHE) over hesitant participation in the 1992 Rio Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) to actual engagement in the 2002 Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) (Heggelund 2007; Najam 2005).

In the 1970s and 1980s, communist China tended to be rather hostile towards international cooperation. Even as the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities slowly started to replace the focus on national sovereignty and non-interference as the cornerstone of Chinese environmental diplomacy during the 1992-2002 period (Ding 2007: 232; Zhang 1998: 14), the country's approach remained defensive in terms of the weight of responsibility for developing versus developed countries

Figure 1. Carbon Dioxide Emissions from Consumption in China (1980-2009)



Source: US Energy Information Administration 2010 (<http://www.eia.gov>)

The most important shift in Chinese engagement in global environmental governance, could, however, be detected in the UN climate regime in more recent years. It was mostly China's intense economic growth and subsequent global political weight that determined this change, as opposed to a transformation of its underlying interests and principles. At the 2009 Copenhagen summit, China played, together with the US, a key role during the last days, which underscored how important the country's position as an emerging economy has become in the climate regime compared to the 1997 Kyoto and 1992 UNFCCC negotiations. China's active cooperation is now a central requirement to reach a global agreement on climate change. Any stand-off between the US and China therefore leads to a stalemate of regime negotiations. In addition to its overall emergence as an economic and political power, this new role in the climate negotiations is particularly due to its

booming GHG emissions during the past 10 years and their resulting and projected impact on the global environment (see Figure 1).

China increasingly recognizes its role in the global climate problematique, but refuses to commit to binding emission reduction targets so far. Current efforts remain limited to the inscription of domestic legislation and targets in the Copenhagen and Cancun deals under the so-called “pledge and review approach”. Before Copenhagen, China had already advanced a number of targets related to energy and carbon efficiency and renewable energy development. These included a reduction of the amount of carbon emitted per unit of GDP by 40 to 45% in 2020 (based on 2005 levels) and a 15% share of renewable energy in its total energy mix by 2020 (United Nations 2010).

A notable shift in China’s stance on climate change actually occurred in the aftermath of the failure to reach a binding global agreement in Copenhagen. As it was fiercely criticized in western media for upholding a defensive position and refusing to move on issues such as measurement, reporting and verification (MRV) and additional reduction targets, the Chinese government reconsidered its external rhetorical strategy. Where Chinese positions often reflected an oppositional, developed versus developing country perspective before 2010, more recent communication indicates the willingness of an inclusive and cooperative approach to tackle climate change, illustrated by vice-minister Xie Zhenhua of China’s National Reform and Development Commission: “Climate change is one of the issues of crucial importance to the interests of human beings and the national development of every country. It requires the collaborative efforts of all countries” (Xie 2011: 1).

China’s “lay-low” strategy at COP 16, the resulting Cancun agreements and parallel domestic measures offer embryonic signs that the central government gradually intends to move from discourse to action. In China’s recent 12<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan (2011-2015), the emphasis lies on relative emission reductions (compared to business-as-usual) derived from its 2020 carbon efficiency target, pilot emission trading systems in five provinces, massive investments in wind and solar technology production and generation capacity and an emerging long-term vision of a low-carbon society (Qi 2011; Xinhua 2011). In addition, China has put forward programmes and strategies to tackle deforestation, coastal eco-system deterioration, water conservation and desertification in various areas of the country (State Council 2008).



In light of China's recent climate actions, one can be tempted to become either overly optimistic or unduly negative about the country's potential for contributing to the solution of global environmental problems. Even if China tends to move at high speed in the direction of, for example, renewable energy development, it is certain that it still needs to step up its efforts to *effectively* tackle both its domestic environmental problems including climate mitigation and adaptation, as well as its global responsibility in the domain of environmental and climate governance - not unlike other major polluters such as the European Union, India or the United States.

### **3. INDIA AS A PLAYER IN GLOBAL GOVERNEMENTAL GOVERNANCE**

To understand India's role in global environmental governance, it is useful to go back in history and review the country's rapid evolution from a developing country to an emerging economy with growth rates between 7 and 9 % over the past decade. This explosive economic growth has been accompanied by the emergence of a middle class and significant technological advancements. At the same time, it has resulted in an acceleration of environmental degradation, while insufficiently reducing poverty: over 80% of the Indian population still live on less than 2\$ per day and the country remains, in many ways, strongly attached to its traditional ways of living (Damodoran 2010).

The evolving nature of the tension between economic, social and environmental development has significantly impacted India's stance on global environmental governance.

The focus on development has long been the central point of reference in India's approach to environmental issues. At the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi set the tone for India's environmental policy for decades to come when stating that "we do not wish to impoverish the environment any further and yet we cannot for a moment forget the grim poverty of large numbers of people. Are not poverty and need the greatest polluters?" (Gandhi 1972). Until very recently, the Indian position in environmental governance institutions has thus tended to be rather defensive and conservative, focusing on equity concerns and arguing for the right to development first and the necessity for industrialized countries to provide financial and technology transfer in line with the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. In the run-up to the 2009 Copenhagen climate summit, Prime Minister Singh promised, for instance, that his country would never exceed the average per capita emissions of

industrialized countries, without, however, showing preparedness to make further commitments (Korppoo/Luta 2009: 54).

Yet, as a result of a rising awareness about climate change and its own vulnerability, India has begun to undertake actions at home, but also with a view to the global political debate and the negotiations under UN auspices.

Domestically, the Indian government has initiated actions at regional and local levels, trying to nest global conventions, notably the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Kyoto Protocol, in its national policies (Damodaran 2010). For one, it has created national and regional versions of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), i.e. an “Indian Network for Comprehensive Climate Change Assessment” of monitoring bodies that are to provide a clearer picture of the real changes occurring within the country and will be publishing GHG inventories at regular intervals (Ramesh 2010). Second, it has taken steps to diversify its energy mix. For instance, a fuel switch from coal to gas is under way, while a clean energy tax on coal is levied, whose revenues will be used toward funding the research and development of clean energy technologies, so as to augment notably its solar power generating capacity. Third, India has opened up to the idea of emissions trading, which is currently being experimented in two of its states (Gujarat, Tamil Nadu). Finally, India has put into place strategies on forestry and coastal management.

In global environmental negotiations, notably on climate change, India has softened its stance rhetorically under its new Environment and Forests Minister Ramesh, in office since May 2009. Although the National Environmental Policy of 2006 still mentioned the “over-riding priority of the right to development” as key guideline of its actions (Indian Ministry of Environment and Forests 2006: 43), the country has in the meantime demonstrated openness for environmental action beyond pure equity concerns. Most interestingly, it accepted an energy intensity target of 20 to 25% by 2020 from 2005 levels, which it inscribed into the Annex of the Copenhagen Accord and a commitment to which it has reconfirmed since then (UNFCCC 2010). At the 2010 Cancun climate summit, Ramesh also announced that India’s Twelfth Five Year Plan, to be launched in April 2012, will be centrally based on a low-carbon growth strategy, fulfilling a key demand by industrialized countries (Ramesh 2010). At the same time, the country’s stance against an international verification of its actions has remained, at least publicly, quite hard. To inter alia fight off what is perceived as too much of an external interference in its domestic policies, India has actively sought to join ranks with China and other emerging economies within the

BASIC coalition. In this group, it has taken on a key role in developing positions and strategies, mediating, for instance, between the US and China in Cancun.

In sum, if India has become part of the problem of environmental degradation at a global scale, there are very recently numerous signs that it will also take on responsibilities as part of the solution, with the stated ambition of providing “responsive leadership” in global environmental governance (Ramesh 2010). It is yet unclear how far the planet’s most populated democratic state is precisely prepared to go in this regard, but there are chances that it could, in the climate domain, even accept binding targets in the medium-term future.

#### **4. A EUROPEAN UNION PERSPECTIVE ON CHINESE AND INDIAN PARTICIPATION IN GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE**

From the perspective of the European Union, China and India are already key players in global politics, but the EU would like to see them engaged to yet a greater degree in the global governance of the environment, notably when it comes to climate change.

Generally, the Union has itself long been the strongest advocate - among the industrialized players - of global, legally binding regimes for tackling environmental (and other) problems, notably in the multilateral framework provided by the UN. This has been most visible in its promotion of a global framework to address climate change. Its external climate policies were, in recent years, supported by solid internal legislation, with, at its heart, the European Emissions Trading System (ETS). On this basis, the Union has attempted to convince China and India that it would be worth imitating the EU model and supporting the idea of a legally binding treaty-based regime on global climate change. To this end, bilateral partnerships and dialogues around specific topics such as environment, climate and energy (China) and health and education (India) were created in recent years (2007-2010).

For a number of reasons, however, cooperation in multilateral global environmental governance has, to date, remained limited.

First, the EU’s preferences and positions seem hardly compatible with those of India and China, who have long been - and arguably remain - primarily interested in the protection of their short-term economic interests. Growth, however, requires energy, which, under the business-as-usual scenario, will primarily stem from fossil fuels.

Second, fundamentally divergent perceptions of the notion of responsibility within the UN climate regime have added to the differences in positions, structurally preventing sustained cooperation. Where the division of parties to the UNFCCC into two categories (Annex I, i.e. industrialized countries, and non-Annex I, i.e. developing countries) still seemed justified on the basis of the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities (and respective capabilities) in the early 1990s, the material realities on which a leading role for the industrialized countries was established have fundamentally changed in the meantime. As the treaty does not provide for the category of “emerging country”, it comes as no surprise that China and India still consider themselves developing countries, regarding the world through the spectre of the status quo of the 1990s. Quite to the contrary, the EU, but also other industrialized countries, tend to look to the 2030s, when the patterns of global GHG emissions, if abovementioned projections can be believed, will have considerably changed.

Finally, a changing institutional context has made it increasingly difficult for the EU to deal with each of the two countries and with the BASIC group as a whole. For the time being, the EU does not possess clarity on whether the countries that have joined together as BASIC will use the latter as a phalanx to defend the status quo, or if the group will become the platform for a more proactive profiling in global environmental/climate governance. In the former case, the BASIC countries risk alienating partners like AOSIS or the Least Developing Countries within their own negotiation coalition, dividing a G-77/China whose heterogeneity was long compensated only by a joint interest in equity concerns. For the EU, this would imply searching coalition partners among these players, as it has already done by co-initiating the Cartagena Dialogue (of industrialized and developing countries) after the 2009 Copenhagen summit. If China and India used the BASIC for a more central role in global environmental governance, the EU might find in these countries the partners that the US and other industrialized parties, for various reasons, could or did not want to be in recent years.

Against this backdrop, Europe’s perspective on the individual roles of China and India in global environmental governance becomes intelligible.

## ***China***

The EU generally seems to part from the assumption that the China’s leaders are very aware of domestic resource and climate vulnerability, in the context of already

existing problems of environmental degradation. At the same time, the Union also notes that China is in need of immense energy resources if it wants to sustain growth figures and lead its population to more widespread prosperity. For both reasons, it is expected that the country will engage in transforming its energy system, while, for quite some time yet, remaining a major polluter heavily reliant on the combustion of coal and oil.

This dilemma, so it seems, also determines the way China approaches its international and domestic environment - notably climate and energy - policies.

Domestically, the above-mentioned objective of a “low-carbon economy” as a national strategy in its 12<sup>th</sup> five-year plan (2011-2015) will partially satisfy EU demands. It comes with the set of measures described above, of which especially China’s massive development of the renewable energy sector and (new) plans for the use of emissions trading provide areas of further cooperation and/or interaction with the EU. A policy shift has taken place in recent months and years regarding the CDM, however. Within the European Commission, the CDM is currently seen as having too many environmental integrity and transparency problems, and as directly subsidizing a main competitor in areas such as renewables and low-carbon technologies (Delbeke 2011).

At the same time, questions can be raised from an EU perspective not so much about the Chinese intentions, but about the country’s capacity to deliver on its objectives. This is especially true if one considers the reluctance of China’s government to commit to anything but voluntary action pledges in the global negotiations on climate change. The 40-45% carbon intensity target by 2020 remains aspirational, from an EU perspective, as long as it is kept outside of the framework of a legally binding agreement, and as long as no stringent international verification is foreseen. From a European point of view, it is currently thus unclear what role China precisely wants to play in global environmental governance: will it continue to be blocked by and in an unfruitful G-2 relationship with the US, in which both consider that the one who moves first loses in environmental politics? Or will it build on its recent action pledges and PR activities stylizing it as an environmental leader to really assume greater responsibilities individually and/or through the BASIC group?

## ***India***

When looking at India, the overarching EU premise is that the country should not be treated like China because the two are fundamentally different in their political, economic and social structures as well as their material capacities and

characteristics. When it comes to the effects of climate change, India is among the most vulnerable countries on the globe. In recent years, the EU has welcomed the transition from the “old guard” of Indian environmental and climate negotiators with their defensive and at times anti-Western discourse to a new team around the more conciliatory Minister Ramesh. Nonetheless, the Indian situation raises some of the same concerns as the Chinese regarding the capacity to avoid making the mistakes the “West” made in the process of industrialization, the continued insistence on equity paired to a reluctance to commit to any binding international treaty foreseeing a verification and compliance mechanism.

In synthesis, when considering the role of China and India in global environmental governance, the EU makes a clear distinction between the two players, while acknowledging that both are central to the future of the globe. This plays out in different ways: while hands-on, bilateral cooperation with both countries is being sought, multilateral cooperation with a view to attaining the more fundamental, overarching objectives of global environmental governance remains a key objective. In pursuing both paths, the EU has to take account of the fact that relations with the two countries span across many policy domains, and that the objectives in the environment and climate fields could come into conflict with EU interests in, for instance, the area of trade.

## **5. CONCLUSION : CHINA, INDIA AND THE FUTURE OF GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE**

China and India are key players in the contemporary world order - economically, politically, but also in terms of the environment. While they are currently often primarily perceived as parts of the problems that render global environmental governance necessary, both have the capacity of strongly contributing to their solution. The workshop highlighted this potential for both countries, but also noted the differences between them.

The approach of the event, touching on the two countries directly and through an EU perspective obviously neglected the other crucial player in global environmental governance: the US. In the concrete context of the ongoing negotiations for a climate regime post-2012, but also in global environmental governance more widely, the relationship between these four players - China, India (or the BASIC), the US and the EU - will, however, be decisive. Currently, there seems to be a trend toward a G-

2 (China/BASIC-US) type of arrangement that keeps the EU increasingly on the sidelines. This constellation favours the emergence of an action-based multilateralism embodied in the “pledge and review approach” of the Copenhagen Accord. Should China, India and the other BASIC countries decide, however, to join forces with the EU, a reinvigorated, treaty-based global multilateralism could become possible, in which US inactivity would not pay off. In both scenarios, cooperation and competition in the renewable energy and low-carbon technology sector is set to play a key role, as shown during the Cancun negotiations in December 2010.

In this regard, the medium-term future of multilateral global environmental governance will probably be co-determined at the upcoming climate negotiations in Durban this year and/or at the Rio+20 summit in 2012. While these events in South Africa and Brazil provide major opportunities for these two BASIC members to profile as responsible global players, their success will - to a large extent - depend on the behaviour of their partners China and India.

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## **Annex I: Programme**

- 14h00      **Welcome and introduction by the chair**
- Prof. H. Bruyninckx**, Director, HIVA, Professor of International Relations and Global Environmental Governance, University of Leuven
- 14h15      **India and global environmental governance**
- Prof. A. Damodaran**, Professor in Economics and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore
- 14h45      **China and global environmental governance**
- Dr. J. Chen**, Second Secretary, Mission of the People's Republic of China to the European Union
- 15h15      **The role of China and India in global environmental governance: a view from the European Union**
- Mr. J. Lefevere**, Adviser, International and Climate Strategy, DG Climate Action, European Commission
- 15h40      **Q&A**
- 16h00      **End of the workshop**



The **Leuven Centre for Global Governance Studies** is an interdisciplinary research centre of the Humanities and Social Sciences at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven. It was set up in the Spring of 2007 to promote, support and carry out high-quality international, innovative and interdisciplinary research on global governance. In addition to its fundamental research activities the Centre carries out independent applied research and offers innovative policy advice and solutions to policy-makers on multilateral governance and global public policy issues.

The Centre brings together talent from throughout the University. It operates on the basis of co-ownership and the strong conviction that interdisciplinary research creates added value to resolve complex multi-faceted international problems. The Centre promotes pioneering projects in law, economics and political science and actively initiates and encourages interdisciplinary, cross-cutting research initiatives in pursuit of solutions to real world problems. The cross-cutting initiatives are thematic projects around which University researchers join forces across disciplines to forge responses to complex global challenges. The cross-cutting initiatives address critical issues in relation to globalization, governance processes and multilateralism, with a particular focus on the following areas: (i) the European Union and global multilateral governance; (ii) trade and sustainable development; (iii) peace and security, including conflict prevention, crisis management and peacebuilding; (iv) human rights, democracy and rule of law.

In full recognition of the complex issues involved, the Centre approaches global governance from a multi-level and multi-actor perspective. The multi-level governance perspective takes the interactions between the various levels of governance (international, European, national, subnational, local) into account, with a particular emphasis on the multifaceted interactions between the United Nations System, the World Trade Organization, the European Union and other regional organizations/actors in global multilateral governance. The multi-actors perspective pertains to the roles and interactions of various actors at different governance levels, these include public authorities, non-governmental organizations and private actors such as corporations.

For more information, please visit the website [www.globalgovernancestudies.eu](http://www.globalgovernancestudies.eu)

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